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Ancient Dolls and Toys Tell Whole History of Race

Author(s): Marjorie MacDill

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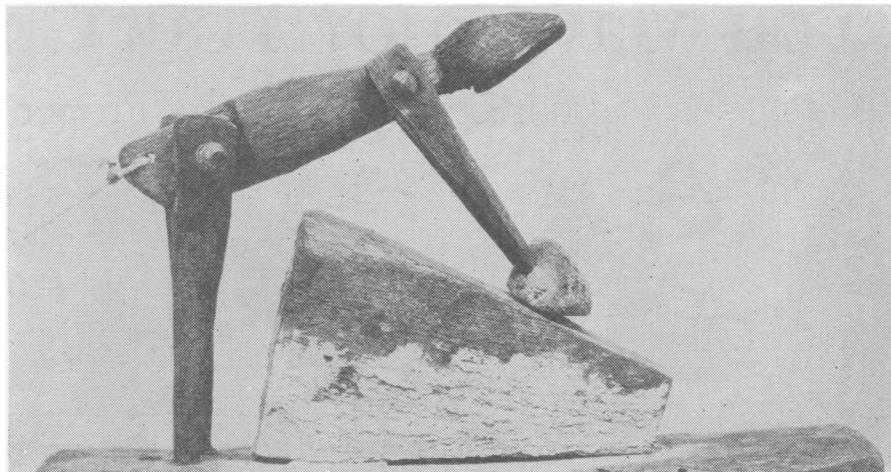


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A bread kneader from Egypt. One of the earliest movable toys known, believed to date back to 2000 B. C.

Ancient Dolls and



Toys Tell Whole History of Race

Archaeology

By Marjorie MacDill

Dear Santy:

I am seven yeres old and have been a good boy all yere, except once or twice, and I want you to bring me an electric train for Christmas and a toy airplane and a motor boat that reely runs in the water and a motor for my meccano set and a trycycle. My sister Betty Jane is four and can't write yet. She wants a doll carriage and a doll house.

Yours truly,

Richard James Howard, Jr.

P. S. we live at 65 Charles St., Warrenford, Ohio, in the brick house on the corner with two chimnies.

Grubby pencils by the thousand are being grasped in grimy fingers in the laborious effort to set forth painful epistles similar in content to the above. For in spite of the blasé veneer of even the youngest generation, about this time of year it is tacitly conceded to be politic not to express too great a disbelief in jolly old Saint Nick.

These childish lists of things hoped for on Christmas Day in the morning contain a lot of unsuspected psychology, and in a way epitomize the whole of human history as well. All through the ages, Richard Junior has shown himself the father of the Richard Senior who is to be: his masculine mind demands the new, the creative, the latest evidence of mechanical advance. But Betty Jane, from Chaldea and Egypt down to New York and Paris, has always wanted the same toys—dolls. She is the maternal, the careful, the conservator of that which will be “good for the children.”

Dr. Karl Groeber of Dresden has made a long study of the history of toys as they portray the minds of children through the ages. He has been thoroughly German in his painstaking exhaustiveness, thoroughly German also in his quick and sympathetic appreciation of the feelings and desires of “die Kinder.”

And he says that from prehistoric times down to the present, a little girl’s play interests always have kept to one orbit. Her mother’s round of household duties is the model for her play until the end of childhood. Her doll’s dress may reflect the change of time in crinoline, stiff brocade or Scotch kilts. Her doll’s house may have four-post beds or old-time cradles, but the idea underlying the little girl’s paraphernalia of playthings remains the same.

But the range of desires in the boy changes often. The creative instinct is more strongly developed in him. The world of affairs his father lives in is reflected in his little cosmos very early, declares Dr. Groeber. Consequently modern toys of boys past infancy bear little resemblance to those that fell into the moat from medieval courtyards or cluttered up odd corners in the marble villas of ancient Rome. To the youngster of today a Trojan horse or a knight in armor wouldn’t mean a thing. He is interested primarily in airplanes, automobiles, speedboats and steam engines—things that copy the latest creations of the grown-up mind. For this reason a survey of toy history throughout the ages gives a picture of human development in miniature.

The toys of very young babies are always fundamentally the same, the German scientist points out. It makes no difference whether we search in ancient Egypt and Persia or in modern Lapland or Fiji, or even in our own toyshops. The very earliest specimens that the museums of the world can show us are rather strikingly similar to the first toys we give to Baby nowadays. The wooden crocodile with a movable jaw that delighted some Egyptian tot three thousand years ago is not so very different from the painted arts-and-crafts toys dispensed from exclusive shops today.

Models for the simple toys of very little children have been based on much the same type of model taken from the immediate environment. Since the older civilization flourished in the warm climates around the eastern end of the Mediterranean, we find in their ruins toys modelled on the characteristic creatures of those southern lands, such as the crocodile and the tiger. The children of the plains Indians of our own West made crude little figures of prairie animals like the bison and the pronghorn antelope.

Wood, being light, unlikely to break, and easy to work, has been a favorite material for toys from time immemorial. Since it is also perishable, comparatively few ancient wooden toys have come down to us. Most of the ancient toys that have survived are of clay. Many of them are little things like clappers, rattles, little pots and, of course, miniature figures of animals. The first dolls

must have been primitive affairs of wood decked with bits of cloth and beads.

The dry soil and climate of the Nile valley have preserved much of what is known of ancient Egyptian history. So many small figures of slaves and attendants were placed in graves to attend gentlefolk after death that it is difficult for archaeologists to distinguish objects of this class from those that were really toys. Among the oldest of the "sure enough" toys that have been found are the little movable figures of the wooden bread kneader and crocodile. There is also a tiger in one of the Old World museums that waggles a bloodthirsty wooden jaw with a string mechanism.

Graves of the sixth and seventh century A. D., opened at Akhamin Panopolis, have yielded a veritable treasure trove of indisputable children's toys. Some of the very earliest dolls known, made of wood with painted heads and hair of crocheted yarn, came to light here. That stock nursery property, a horse on wheels dragged about by a string, also dates from this period. The specimens found differ very little, in the estimation of Dr. Goeber, from those made and sold by the Berchtesgaden wood carvers of Germany a thousand years later.

In the year 1100 B. C. the foundation stone of a temple was laid in Susa, Persia. Onlookers threw in pious offerings of their most prized possessions. Centuries later, when this site was excavated by archaeologists, among the offerings found were two little animals made of white sandstone. One was a lion and the other was an indeterminate sort of creature that might have been either a pig or porcupine. Both were on little wheeled stands, with a hole through one end for a string. From Babylon the solitary find of this sort is an alabaster doll with movable arms. Recent excavations at Kish have brought to

light a toy chariot with six horses that must have made some young men of five thousand years ago wild with joy.

Toy remains from the glory and grandeur of Greece and Rome are all too few. The literature of the period has few references to toys, but Greek vases showing children's scenes give some idea of how the youngsters played. For one thing, they had clappers or rattles. Anchyras, the mathematician and soldier, is said to have perfected a toy of this type. The young Greeks had two-wheeled carts with a long pole and crossbar for a handle. This species of classical express wagon, we know from a chance reference in one of Aristophanes' comedies, cost an obulus apiece, or about three cents, in the Athens market. We also know that the boys had toy soldiers of wood which were kept inside hollow Trojan horses, faithful to the best classical tradition of the fall of Troy. According to later reports, wooden horses were made and sold in the neighborhood of the Trojan ruins along with regiments of little soldiers to fill them.

The only Greek and Roman dolls that have survived are of clay with arms and legs fastened to the trunk with strings. There are also a few small pieces of bronze furniture. From references in classical literature we know that a Roman girl on her wedding morning sacrificed her dolls to the goddess of marriage.

Even less is known about the toys of the children of the early middle ages than of those of antiquity. The primitive standard of living and total absence of comfort of that rough era probably did not foster any very elaborate amusements for the offspring of even the nobility. Children were not considered important, so they are seldom mentioned, and, aside from representations of the Christ Child, not often pictured. There are a few clay dolls, horses and armored knights. In one collection of Europe is a tiny

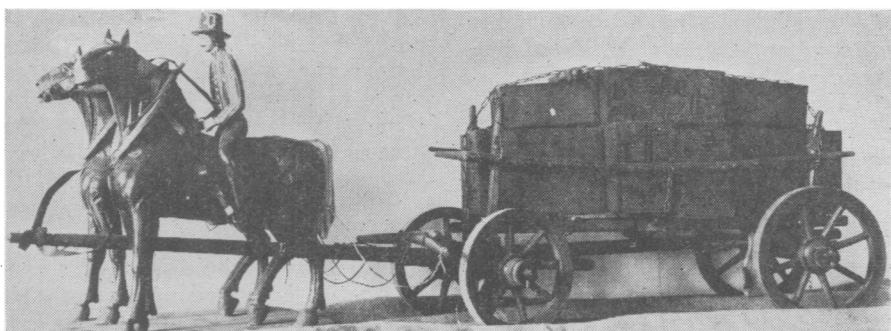
lady on a palfrey with a falcon on her wrist.

One of the most interesting relics of the Middle Ages comes from France. On the bridges over the Seine during medieval times were little booths and stalls at which figures of the saints and little knicknacks of tin and lead were offered for sale to passers-by. Whether one of these shops was destroyed or whether it had a more than usually wide crack in the floor will never be known, but when recent dredging operations were under way in the Seine several of these little lead and tin figures were found. Among them was a little tin knight in armor that can be fairly classed as the forerunner of all the legions of tin soldiers that saw the light of day in the nineteenth century. The tiny tin knight is unmistakably a real tin soldier, with a base to hold him upright just like those attached to the feet of the tin armies procurable on the ten-cent store counter today.

Brass horses we learn about from a North German saga, which tells of a youth of six who lends his four-year-old friend his brazen steed to play with.

Though no dolls of the fifteenth century have survived that can be dated definitely, there is evidence that there were hand workers of Nuremberg at this period who made the production of dolls their principal business. About other kinds of playthings at this time there is no information in any book or picture, save here and there a little windmill or hobby horse in the hands of the Christ Child or his small friends in some church painting of the Holy Family. Several gorgeous figures of miniature knights have been preserved, however, from late medieval times.

If it were not for the woodcut of the games of the young Kaiser Maximilian I, made by Burgkmair in 1516, they might have been regarded simply as models of tilting armor. This picture shows that these elaborately accoutred figures were used in a tilting game on a table. They were placed opposite each other with lances crouched. Then each child pushed his knight against that of the other, trying to strike (*Turn to page 390*)



Courtesy of Museum of Gg. Lang s. Erben, Oberammeyau.

Horses and wagon made by the famous toy makers of Oberammergau. Forerunner of the miniature "Graf Zeppelin" of today.

Toys Tell History of Race—Continued

his opponent so as to heave him out of the saddle.

One of these miniature knights, now in the Bavarian National Museum at Munich, is so grand that it could only have been intended for a young princeling. The work of the most skilled armorer was necessary to reproduce the minutely detailed copy of a knight's harness. The figures of the horse and his rider are the work of expert carvers, while the trappings of thin silk are a precise copy of the full-sized original in tournament array.

There are no records to show how the manufacture of toys was regulated by the medieval guilds. Only by the sixteenth century is it possible to get a glimpse of how the famous toy trade of Germany was organized. Manufacture of objects for the church had been falling off in many places, especially in the north of Germany. Consequently, artists and craftsmen began to cast about for a less pretentious medium for their craft.

About this time the collecting habit

arose. That pride and joy of a little girl's heart, the doll house, became the plaything of queens and duchesses. Even the substantial burghers of Holland wasted fortunes on them. They became, in fact, curio cabinets and a sort of symbol or outward sign of the collector-owner's wealth and position. The new craze, of course, stimulated toy making. Nuremberg became the center of the toy industry of the world, though Augsberg and Ulm also became renowned for their doll houses, furniture and fittings.

Many of the furnishings were made by craftsmen as incidentals to their trade, for the regulations of the old-time guilds were as complicated as those of any present-day plumbers' or carpenters' union. The cabinet-maker made to order the furniture for the doll house, the tin and cooper smiths the utensils and the potter the tiny bits of crockery. Thus each trade got a share of the business. With such restrictions there could be no toy factory in the modern sense of the word, for even the man who made the dolls' heads could not paint the faces on them. They had to be turned over to a fellow who was known as a "bismuth painter."

Nuremberg did not rest its reputation as a toy town entirely on the local craftsmen. It was really a distribution depot for the simple wooden toys made by the peasants of Berchtesgaden, Thuringia and Oberammer-

gau, who spent the long winter months carving household utensils, such as spoons and bowls, and eventually toys.

At first the craft was a purely home industry, but the peasant carvers gradually came to conform to the demands of the trade until toys from these regions took on a characteristic uniform appearance well known to all parts of the globe where Nuremberg toy agents penetrated.

Oberammergau, the home of the Passion Play, was the first place, so far as can be learned, where these light and pretty toys were made. Their manufacture sprang up first in connection with the carving of crucifixes and images of the saints. The workers considered themselves artists and organized a carvers' guild. Unhappily, the growth of mass production has forced this type of artisan practically out of existence. He has become a factory hand and his individual touch, which gave the inexpensive toys of the past personality and charm has vanished completely.

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Ilium—Cont'd

will I maintain that his acquaintance with the Troad and with Troy was that of a resident; but certainly he was not without personal knowledge of the localities, for his descriptions of the Troad in general, and of the Plain of Troy in particular, are too truthful for us to believe that he could have drawn all his details from the ancient myth. If, as appears likely, he visited the Plain in the ninth century B. C., he would probably have found the Aeolic Ilium already long established, having its Acropolis on Hissarlik and its lower town on the site of Novum Ilium. It would, therefore, be but natural that he should depict Priam's Troy as a large city, with an acropolis called Pergamos, the more so as in his time every larger city had its Acropolis. My excavations have reduced the Homeric Ilium to its real proportions.

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